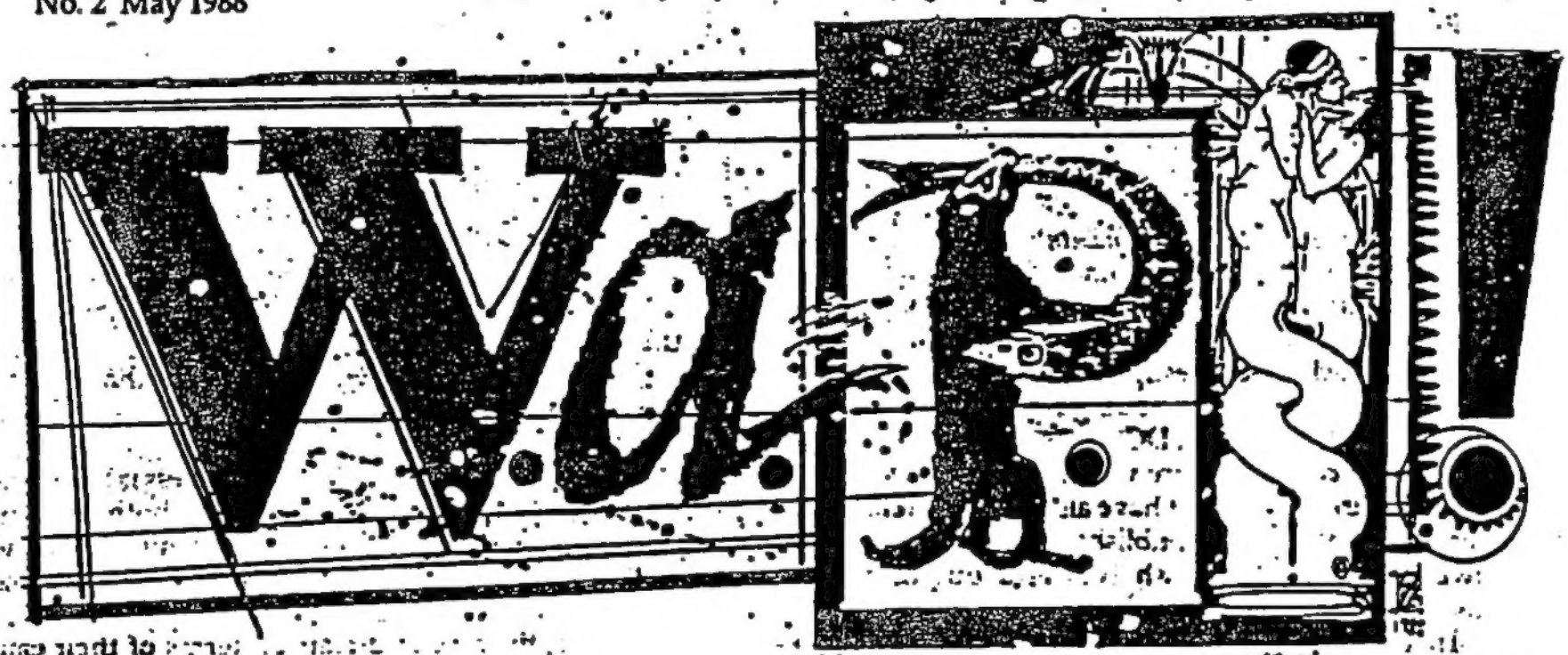
No. 2 May 1988



My Distributor, My Enemy?

"... it is our feeling we should no longer carry and promote Puma Blues."

William D. Schanes
National Account Representative
Diamond Comics Distribution, Inc.
in a letter to Dave Sim dated December 23, 1987

"... we were not threatening to not carry Puma Blues ... there's no way I'm going to deal with Aardvark-Vanaheim for Puma Blues, Cerebus, or any other publication that he comes out with ..."

Steve Geppi
President, Diamond Comics Distribution, Inc.
to an audience of publishers and retailers
April 26, 1988

Diamond Comics Distributors, Inc. president Steve Geppi has threatened that he will refuse to carry all comics published by Aardvark-Vanaheim, which include Dave Sim's *Cerebus*, Stephen Murphy and Michael Zulli's *The Puma Blues*, and Stephen Bissette and John Totleben's upcoming horror anthology *Taboo*.

The threat has teeth. The largest distributor in the direct sales market, Diamond circulates between 25% and 30% of all comics sold in specialty shops -- enough to mean life or death for a small publisher.

Why would Diamond take such action? It's economic coercion, pure and simple. Sim's Cerebus collection *High Society* is currently available only by

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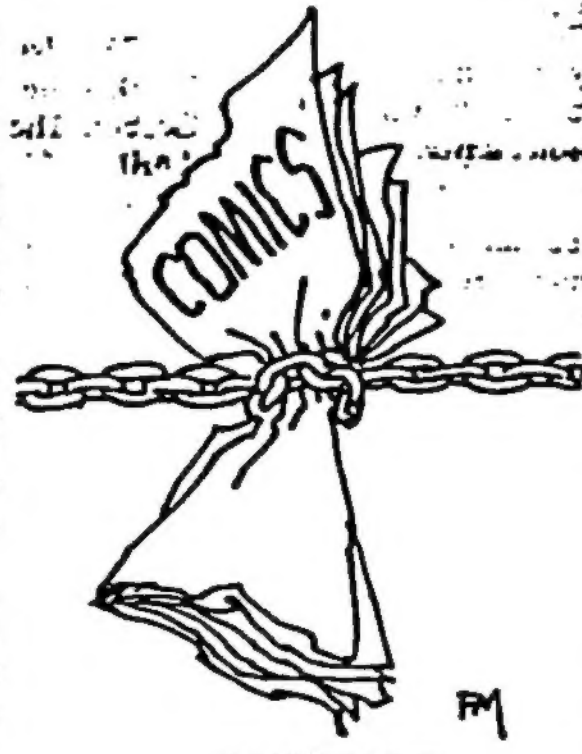


© 1988 Frank Miller

Christy Marx vs. The Censors

In the March 7, 1988 edition of the Halifax, Nova Scotia *Chronicle-Herald*, a woman named Francene Cosman wrote a guest editorial called "Not-So-Funny Comic Books." It begins by talking about adult comics, immediately makes the jump that only children read them, and attempts to sweep the reader into horror and loathing. It's particularly interesting that the writer uses the jargon of liberalism in a plea for censorship. In this country, what few recent attacks on comics we've had have been the doing of conservatives. Canada shows us the liberal flipside.

The two comics Ms. Cosman singles out for discussion are *Hellblazer* and *Sisterhood of Steel*. Keep in mind that she's speaking of the *Sisterhood of Steel* graphic novel, and that *Hellblazer* is clearly emblazoned with the disclaimer: *Suggested For Mature Readers*. Like most would-be censors, Ms. Cosman ignores these factors while trying to stir up liberal frenzy. Her description of *Hellblazer* #5:

"Gratuitous violence seems to be the theme of these two publications, and it is the portrayal of gratuitous violence, directed toward women and minorities, that leaves me wondering what these comics are really about.

"Under the guise of light reading and comic adventure, Hellblazer depicts a Vietnamese veteran suffering shell shock from the war who, upon returning to his home town, suffers recurring flashbacks of his role in the war.

continued on page 10

Before the Flood

Beginning this summer and continuing at least through the end of the year, Marvel and DC will inundate the comic book market with an unprecedented quantity of product. All three *Spider-Man* books, for example, will be published *semi-monthly* for the summer, as will *X-Men* and at least one other title — *in addition* to those magazines' usual summer annuals. Both major companies will also be issuing an array of hardcover, trade paperback, and "prestige format" books, some new material, some reprints, including a $50.00 leatherbound edition of *Watchmen* from DC.

The two companies are warring not only with one other for market share but have also, sources tell us, targeted the independent publishers, with the intent of crowding them off the shelves and out of retailer budgets.

There are signs that this brute force strategy is working. Comic book dealers, never particularly noted for their canniness, typically allocate purchasing capital for Marvel and DC books first, then divide whatever is left among all the other publishers. Because of the product glut from the majors, specialty shops are ordering fewer comics from the independents this summer than at any comparable period in recent memory.

DC and Marvel will no doubt be delighted to hear this. Freelancers should not be.

There exists the serious possibility that by autumn the industry could lose one—if not more—of its "middle three" publishers.

If this happens, much of the progress made in the last decade of independent publishing, both in terms of maturing content and artists' ownership of their work, could be wiped out. Freelancers may find themselves once again in the stranglehold of two imperious, lumbering monoliths able to dictate all terms of their employment.

Freelancers Anonymous

Comic book publishers have been notoriously vindictive toward freelancers who criticize them in print. In the past, this has proved an all-too-effective deterrent against any wide dissemination among writers and artists of views which ran counter to the company line.

If you want to contribute to *WAP!* but are concerned about reprisals from your publisher, we understand.

For this reason, no contributor to *WAP!* is required to write or draw under a byline.

You can contribute completely anonymously. (Well, almost completely. *We* have to know who you are. But we won't tell anyone—not *anyone*—and that's a promise.)

Or, you can choose to be listed only in our "contributors-this-issue" box, with no reference to the specific nature of your contribution.

Or, if you're in one of those damn-the-torpedoes moods, you can insist on a full byline, as well as the listing in the contributors box.

Whatever your choice, please do contribute! Cartoons, articles, letters, news, gossip, and entries for our jargon-English dictionary are always welcome from all comic book freelancers.

The address for editorial contributions is:

WAP!
1879 East Orange Grove
Pasadena, CA 91104

Our Sin of Omission...

You may have wondered why the names of the *WAP!* editorial board didn't appear anywhere in the first issue of the newsletter. You'll have difficulty believing it, especially in this age of profuse editorial credits on comic book stories, but the omission was entirely accidental.

Prior to the release of *WAP! #1*, we published a smaller, cruder version of the newsletter as *WAP! #0*. This version was distributed by hand to freelancers who attended the Friendly Frank's benefit at the Golden Apple comic book shop in Los Angeles. Though much material was added to #1, *one paragraph* was cut from *WAP!*'s Statement of Intent, because it made reference to the 0th issue. The paragraph read, in part:

> This issue, *WAP! #0*, is a sample, assembled by Frank Miller, Bill Sienkiewicz, Steven Grant, and Steve Gerber. The first "real" issue will be published in mid-April.

The rest of the paragraph referred to material that would appear in "future issues" — some of which appeared in *WAP! #1*.

After the first issue was released, we began getting phone calls from people who had seen *#0*, asking why we hadn't put our names on issue *#1*. It was *then* that we realized the Statement of Intent was the only article which mentioned our names —and that the paragraph containing this information had been deleted. The deletion was made *solely* because of the reference to *WAP! #0*, not to hide our identities.

Others contributors in various capacities to *WAP! #1* included Sergio Aragones; Steve Bissette, and Mark Evanier.

Our apologies to all for the omission. Now the only mystery that remains is: what does the "RFH" in RFH Publications stand for?

We're not telling.

What You Mean "We", Paleface?

Maybe Dave Sim has been right all along.

Sim publishes, writes, and, with his collaborator Gerhard, draws his monthly comic book *Cerebus*. He's done quite well with it, to hear him talk. Simply by cutting out the middlemen's fat salaries and free lunches, Sim enjoys freedom and prosperity from a comic that Marvel or DC would routinely cancel for poor sales.

As a self-publisher, he has also more tenaciously defended his work than most freelancers would, particularly those who surrender their copyrights. He hasn't the economic clout of larger publishers, but while they are often cowed and coerced by distributors, retailers, and others, and shrink in terror at any sign of bad publicity, Sim responds with the intensity of an artist who believes his work is more than simply something to be exchanged for a check.

As Steve Geppi is learning, Dave Sim is a tough opponent.

Sim's not the only artist to self-publish, but he's the most outspoken champion of self-publishing, telling every freelancer within earshot that it's the only way to go – and sponsoring the efforts of those he can convince.

The idea has taken a while to catch on with DC and Marvel artists and writers, though, since few of them possess the will or desire to become entrepreneurs, and many are stopped dead by business and monetary fears.

He might never have convinced Steve Bissette, Dave Gibbons, Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Bill Sienkiewicz, and John Totleben to give it try, had Marvel, DC, and other publishers not made it clear that self-publishing would be easier than wrestling with dinosaurs. If freelancers can't trust publishers to defend the interests of talent against pressure groups, it may be the only route left.

WAP! is planning an upcoming issue devoted to the rise of self- publishing, its consequences, and its effects. Any freelancer wishing to take part in this discussion should contact us.

Thaw and Serve

Italian publisher Frigidaire, best known for publishing Liberatore's *Ranxerox*, has ripped off American cartoonist Geof Darrow.

The February/March and April/May 1988 editions of *Frigidaire Magazine* featured 25 pages from Darrow's graphic novel, *Comics and Stories*. Not only did Frigidaire reprint Darrow's work without his permission, in direct violation of international copyright law, they also rearranged panels and rewrote his story. And no, of course they haven't paid him. Not one red lire.

Word is they photographed the pages from the printed book itself, adding insult to injury by reproducing Darrow's artwork in the worst manner possible.

Darrow is considering legal action.

© 1988 Geof Darrow

Prestige Ain't Nothin' But a Format

We're confused about what passes for graphic novels these days, and we don't seem to be the only ones. What *are* "graphic novels"? What distinguishes them from a garden variety comic book? Is anyone seriously trying to achieve the bookstore success of *Maus* and *Dark Knight*, the generation of a new, serious form, or is this just a fad, a quickly passing bandwagon that publishers can hop aboard to grab a few quick bucks?

If we take a cue from the literary world and assume that a graphic novel is "a long work of fiction with an intricate plot, told in words and pictures," very few of the overpriced, square-bound publications now flooding the marketplace deserve the designation.

Maybe that's why many publishers have adopted a far less rigorous definition: "forty-eight to sixty-four pages of standard superhero comics printed on larger-sized, glossy paper."

Publishers don't have stories they need to tell or visions they feel compelled to realize. Few of them know how to write a story, fewer how to draw one. They do, however, know how to pay to get enough lines drawn and letters lettered to fill a squarebound booklet, and how to dredge up old pulp comics, embarrass them with garish color, and reprint them on shiny white paper.

Format they can control. Therefore, for most publishers, format determines what is or isn't a graphic novel.

Make that format and convenience. And image. They can look like book publishers but they don't have to act like book publishers. Marvel, for example, finds it convenient to pay exactly half the standard author's royalty—a piddling 4%, which they will not even guarantee in writing—on sales of their hardbound and trade paperback collections. They hawk these items to booksellers as "graphic novels." (Whether or not they are actually billed as "graphic novels" is irrelevant. They exist in the same approximate form as "graphic novels," are made to stand on a shelf side by side with graphic novels, and to a bookseller become graphic novels by association.) To freelancers, however, they're classed as reprints. DC joins in the pillage by denying the writers and artists of *Swamp Thing*, *Superman*, and other titles any share whatsoever in the growing success of their book format overseas editions. This, of course, has been typical DC and Marvel behavior for decades. It has always been wrong, and ultimately it has always made for bad comics and the alienation of the cream of the creative crop.

Were the sudden proliferation of sloppily produced "prestige format" comics just another exploitation of the existing market, it would be bad enough. Now, however, the publishers' shortsightedness and greed also directly endanger the chance for a permanent change in the public's perception of what comics are and can become.

New vendors and readers, attracted by recent media attention to comics, will probably not be patient enough to sift through heaps of superhero reprints to find the genuine graphic novels. A new audience—an audience whose absence has long been bemoaned by publishers, and one that can potentially break the deathgrip the landlocked direct sales market has on the industry—is hungry for a steady stream of innovative, intelligent material. We stand to lose this new audience—whose tastes and purchasing patterns extend far wider than the fixed habits of fandom—by allowing the publishers to confirm their worst suspicions about comics. If most publishers have a point of view, it seems to be that the new audience can be suckered into becoming fans of the same old material by disguising it as a "graphic novel." The "graphic novel" has become a short-term and profitable loss leader for the standard lines of comics.

Even beyond that, the "prestige format" blitz appears to be part of a strategy to tie up distributor and retailer dollars, thereby threatening smaller publishers with extinction and shutting down whole markets for freelancers. [See "Before the Flood", page 2].

When will the publishers wise up?

They can shuck the retailers for a little while. They can squeeze a few extra bucks out of the fanboys and X-heads by publishing regular comics in "prestige formats." They can even sell a few books to curiosity seekers rather than truly broadening their audience.

But they can't change the fact that the content of the words and pictures, not the brand name and binding, not the format, make a comic book worth reading.

None Dare Call It Payola

In the 'fifties, record companies frequently made under-the-table payments to radio disk jockeys, in exchange for which the jocks gave extra airplay to whatever new record the company wanted to promote. This practice came to be known as "payola." It prompted a full-scale Congressional hearing, after which it was outlawed.

Now, however, direct sale distributors and comic book publishers—most notably DC—have come up with an interesting new variation on this scheme. While it may not be precisely illegal, its ethics are at best questionable.

It works like this: the comic book publisher buys advertising in a distributor's catalogue. The advertising space turns out to be considerably more expensive than one might expect – expensive enough, frequently, to pay the entire bill for printing the catalogue. The catalogue, purely by coincidence, of course, happens to give extensive coverage to that publisher's wares throughout its pages.

What's wrong with this practice? How does it differ from the wholly legitimate custom of publishers' buying catalogue advertising?

For one thing, the comic book retailers who receive the catalogue are likely to be unaware of the exchange of favors, and, for better or worse, they tend to take distributors' recommendations seriously. Retailers would assume that the distributor's enthusiasm for a particular product arises out of a belief in that product's marketability. They may be unaware that the distributor's coverage is for sale.

In addition, the prospect of a free catalogue printing encourages distributors to cosy up to the larger, cash-rich publishers at the expense of the smaller ones – and the freelancers who work for them. Why should a distributor go out of his way to recommend your new book from First or Dark Horse or Eclipse when it means jeopardizing a major publisher's subsidy of his printing bill?

Don't expect any Congressional investigations of this new payola arrangement. Comics remain a much smaller industry than broadcasting, and the distributors' catalogues are rarely seen by anyone but retailers. Unfortunately, what the distributors choose to promote can make a difference in which comics reach the *public* and in what quantities. It would benefit the entire industry if their testimonials were not available to the highest bidder.

Market Notes

Eclipse Comics is looking for a top-notch artist to draw *Airboy #45-49*, to be written by series regular Chuck Dixon. The story is a serial intended for later repackaging in a quality format, and will lead into the *Airboy #50* "anniversary" issue. Contact editor Cat Yronwode at (707) 887-1521.

Stevens Slimed

In the March, 1988 issue of *The Comics Journal*, artist Dave Stevens (*Rocketeer*) was falsely accused of plagiarism. Under the headline "What Do We Have Here?", the *Journal* reproduced one of Stevens's greeting card drawings next to a very similar 1945 *Brenda Starr* panel by Dale Messick.

Had the *Journal* bothered to call Stevens up before maligning him, they would have found out that he had never seen the Messick panel. The art director who hired Stevens *had*, however, before composing the sketch from which Stevens worked.

Stevens thus joins Will Eisner, Jean "Moebius" Giraud, Harlan Ellison, Howard Chaykin, and other prominent cartoonists and authors whom the *Journal* has declared ethically, morally, creatively, or politically bankrupt.

Congratulations, Dave. You're in good company.

Have You Been Slimed?

If so, drop a line and let us know. *WAP!* is proud of you and eager to spread the word to your fellow honorees in the freelance community.

The Freelancer's Lexicon was squeezed out by late-breaking news this issue, but it will return in *WAP! #3*. So where are *your* definitions?

Electronic WAP!

If you own a personal computer and a modem, you'll soon be able to contact *WAP!* electronically.

Beginning this month, a special message folder and file directory for *WAP!*-related communications will be opening up on the *Writers' Exchange* bulletin board system in Los Angeles. This special section of the board will be accessible exclusively to comic book freelancers.

To register as a user of the *Writers' Exchange*, just have your modem call our modem at 818-843-7898.

The service is free, except for the phone call. *All* comic book freelancers – not just writers – are welcome.

If you're a user of the CompuServe Information Service, you'll also be able to contact *WAP!* – and each other – in a special freelancers-only section of the Comics & Animation Forum on CIS. Watch for details on the *WAP!*-CIS connection both here and on CompuServe.

direct mail. Diamond wants to distribute it. In December 1987 Diamond threatened to "no longer carry and promote *Puma Blues*", only to back down when Sim publicly accused the company of "extortion."

Geppi revived the controversy in two speeches, delivered on Sunday, April 24, 1988, and Tuesday, April 26, at the fifth annual Diamond Seminar for comic book retailers in Washington, D.C. Cheryl Hackworth Prindle, Executive Director of Mirage Studios, taped Geppi's April 26th remarks and provided WAPI with the following excerpt:

There is something that I want to address with you that I think really is significant and important and I hope the publishers will bear with me on this because they have been through this Sunday night. Some of the retailers have, through mainly the publishers, will know what I'm going to talk about.

There is another announcement that I made, albeit one that I had not prepared to make, Friday when I arrived in Baltimore coming back from a DC meeting in South Carolina. I know all of you are aware of the situation that developed between Diamond and Aardvark-Vanaheim. I thought it would be appropriate, at a time like this, when I'm standing in front of so many of my customers and so many people in the industry, to just kind of clarify what that situation was.

As you no doubt have read about and saw, there was a letter that was communicated to Dave Sim by Bill Schanes in reference to our position, as to how we handled High Society. *As you all know that is a pretty frustrating situation; as retailers, you want to get as much product as you can from the*

Happy Hunting Grounds

© 1988 Stephen R. Bissette

publishers, particularly in cases where you've supported the publisher to his success. It's kind of irritating when there is another project that you know your customers want, and you have to tell them you can't give it to them because it's not available to you. But, nonetheless, each person is entitled to his own discretion. If he wants to sell something direct or what have you, he is entitled to do that.

But, in discussing that with Dave, the first time around when the first printing came out, we had a very good conversation. I don't know how long ago this was—a year and a half ago or something like that—and, while I disagreed with Dave about it, it became water under the bridge.

Then later on, Dave decided, perhaps maybe because of the conversation with me, I don't know, to consider doing a second printing of High Society *and to make it available to distributors. He communicated that to us; at the time he indicated that if he could get 6,000 copies of orders that it would be cost-effective enough for him to be able to make it available to us at a discount that we could pass on to you that would fit the direct market's requirement.*

To our surprise, and as you've read about, when Diamond turned in an order that was better than a third of his share as we perceive it to be, when suddenly, instead of getting our copies, got a press release indicating that we weren't going to get this because Dave had decided that the numbers were insufficient for the market.

We were surprised but at the same token we felt, "well, we'll call Dave up and find out what's going on." Well, you read about how Dave has a feeling that he doesn't talk to anyone but the president, so I guess maybe I've fallen down on the job there, I don't know. But I felt that I had a person who was in charge of purchasing—who had the authority to buy—to call him. So it seemed a reasonable approach to ask the man whether we could, you know, negotiate something.

As it turns out, one of the major distributors had forgotten to solicit it and that—if that had been as simple as it was stated—we could have fixed it there, or even Diamond could have offered—in fact, we did—to buy the entire print run, because we felt that strongly about the product. But, nonetheless, the letter was communicated because we just couldn't get Dave to return Bill's phone calls.

You read the letter, perhaps in Cerebus; *it was reprinted. I personally feel that that letter was a very professional letter—one that stated very clearly that we were not threatening to not carry* Puma Blues, *but rather we were beckoning Dave to make a responsible call to his—one of his major accounts. Well, you saw what followed: Dave responded to the press. He felt we were big bullies and that we were persecuting creators and what have you and the like. And, while I don't feel at all that that was the case, in reading those articles, I noticed that Dave entreated me to call him personally and perhaps we could work it out.*

First of all, Diamond always takes the position that your interests are first. Even if we have to swallow our pride sometimes, we try to get the product for you because we figure that's a cost we can absorb up to a point. And, so I called Dave and I had a very unique conversation, I might say, for two hours. And in that conversation, while I was rather frustrated, it was a rather pleasant conversation. It was as pleasant as it could be under the circumstances. And I stressed to Dave that my purpose in calling him was not about High Society *anymore,*

Continued on next page

The Puma Blues Press Release

What follows is the text of a press release to announce the *Puma Blues* special edition mentioned in Steve Geppi's speech. This text differs slightly from that of an earlier release (unavailable at press time) which was sent to the distributors. The information it contains, however, is substantially the same.

Re: An announcement that the 20th issue of *The Puma Blues* will include material contributed by the following creators:

Steve Bissette	Frank Miller
Chester Brown	Alan Moore
Ryan Brown	Nancy O'Connor
Dan Day	David Roman
Kevin Eastman	Arn Saba
Gerhard	Dave Sim
Keith Giffen	Tom Sutton
Mike Grell	Tim Truman
Peter Laird	Rick Veitch
Jim Lawson	Tom Veitch

The contributed material consists of stories, single-page illustrations, and illustrated essays.

Such contributions are meant as a show of creator solidarity. The writers and artists involved have made their contributions not only to offer support to *Puma Blues* creators Stephen Murphy and Michael Zulli but also, and more importantly, to make known that actions such as those recently directed against *Puma* by Diamond Comic Distributors are not only economically and emotionally unfair, but professionally intolerable as well.

The material will appear in *The Puma Blues* #20, on sale in late July. The page count will be between 40 and 50 pages, with a cover price of $2.25-U.S., and $2.75-Canadian. Portions of the proceeds will go to both the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund and the Comics Legends Legal Defense Fund.

Further news releases will list any additional contributors.

Thank you.

Stephen Murphy
Michael Zulli
17 April 1988

but it was about Puma Blues, and to reassure him that I had no intention, as I thought the letter clearly stated, to not carry Puma Blues.

So Dave still stood his ground and said that, no, he wasn't going to make it available, and he gave different reasons about High Society but then I said okay, well, I'll still carry Puma Blues. I don't agree with you. I have to tell my retailers that you're not going to allow them to have it—at least not through us—but, you know, then I disagree with your misinterpreting the value of the retailer/distributor link, but that's your prerogative. I'll still carry Puma Blues because I think they'd like to have the product and I don't want bad press for the industry because that doesn't help anybody.

That's why I must tell you: that's pretty tough to do, especially when at the time you tell him that you already have a copy of the letter that was pretending to be printed in Cerebus, and, you assume, that at the end of that conversation that, well, everything's well and he's not going to print that letter. Although I really didn't care that much because I felt the letter was actually in our favor once people read it. Nonetheless, that was a little irritating when the letter appeared, but, perhaps the reason was that it was already to press and it couldn't be stopped, I don't know.

Then we read about the article in the, ah, Comics Journal and, you know, they're doing their job, and they mentioned this situation and they talk about the headlines that "Diamond Backs Down." I think—if you hear what I'm saying—that wasn't really the case. We deferred because we felt that, you know, it wasn't in the interest of the industry, and so much for that.

At that point, it's kind of like a "strike two" situation, though, if you know what I mean. I come back from Hilton Head, South Carolina Friday night, and I have to tell you: there was a seminar planned, I had a million other things I had to be dealing with, and the last thing I needed to see was this.

I want to read you something that I got in the mail from Aardvark One International. It says: "Attention all distributors"—it's regarding a special benefit issue of The Puma Blues—"The Puma Blues #20, shipping late July, 1988, will be a benefit issue containing material contributed by a number of comic writers and artists. Contributions have been made in order to show solidarity for Puma creators Stephen Murphy and Michael Zulli, in light of the unfair emotional and economic strain they have experienced as a result of Diamond Distributors' problem with Dave Sim over High Society."...and it goes on to list all the different creators who are contributing.

First of all, I don't know where in the world they got the idea that there was economic strain, because we never missed an issue. In fact, we're still way ahead of schedule, due to them being behind schedule. And, as far as emotional strain, that's very subjective.

I have to tell you, at this point, as I said to the publishers Sunday night, there's a mirror in my bathroom that I get up every morning and I look in, and there's no way—there's no way in hell that I can go and look at that mirror in the morning and respect myself if I continue to do business with a man who shows no respect for me. He is trying to humiliate my company, he has tried to humiliate one of my employees through that letterand not only that, he's trying to get me to finance it.

I'm sorry, as your distributor, to tell you that I'm going to make one phone call to this man, even as a last-ditch effort, for him to have the opportunity to tell me that this is some kind of an April Fool's joke, because if it isn't, and I expect his answer to be negative, then there's no way I'm going to deal with Aardvark-Vanaheim for Puma Blues, Cerebus, or any other publication that he comes out with.

If that is an inconvenience for you, I'm terribly sorry as your distributor to have to do that, but I hope that your inconvenience will be more than outweighed in perhaps some respect for Diamond's position on this. I don't know how you feel, but that's what I have to do.

"There's no way in hell that I can go and look at that mirror in the morning and respect myself if I continue to do business with a man who shows no respect for me."

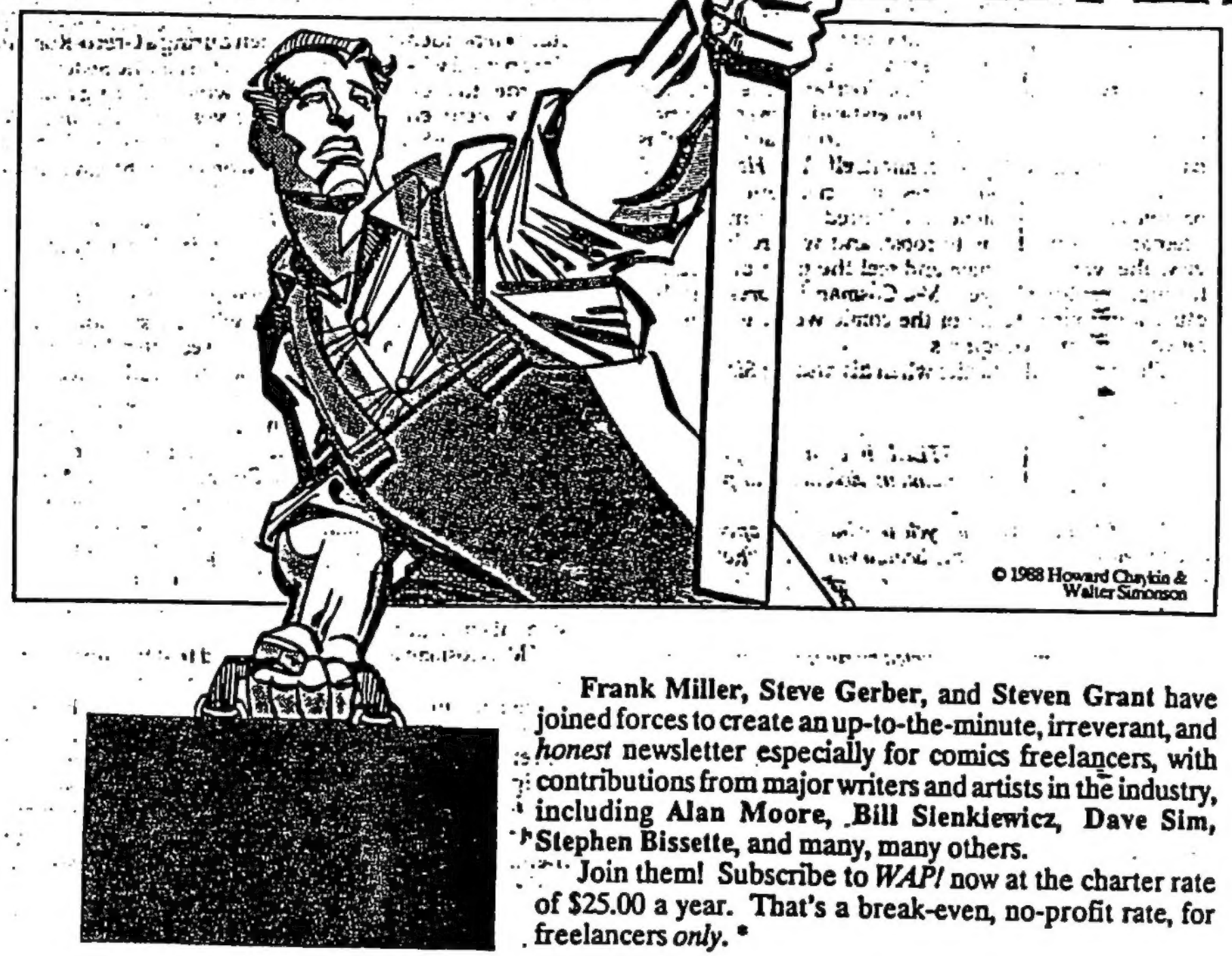
-- Steve Geppi, President of Diamond Distributors

The complete text of the press release mentioned by Geppi appears on page 7 of this issue.

According to a member of the audience, Geppi, in his Sunday night version of the speech, delivered to the publishers, inveighed against the concept of self-publishing in general and said that Diamond "would not do business with a company who is using leverage like Dave's." Presumably, this means a company which chooses to distribute some of its product by direct mail only and which, if threatened with pressure from a distributor, takes the matter public.

Sim, Murphy, Zulli, Bissette, and Totleben are conferring with Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird [*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*], as well as with Dave Gibbons, Frank Miller, Alan Moore, and Bill Sienkiewicz, all of whom will be self-publishing new work this year, to discuss what measures can be taken to defend against strong-arm tactics by Diamond and other distributors. Results of that meeting will be reported in next month's *WAP!*

WORKERS UNITE!!



Frank Miller, Steve Gerber, and Steven Grant have joined forces to create an up-to-the-minute, irreverant, and *honest* newsletter especially for comics freelancers, with contributions from major writers and artists in the industry, including **Alan Moore, Bill Sienkiewicz, Dave Sim, Stephen Bissette,** and many, many others.

Join them! Subscribe to *WAP!* now at the charter rate of $25.00 a year. That's a break-even, no-profit rate, for freelancers *only*. *

[ ] Sign me up for one year of WAP! at the exclusive Freelancers Rate of $25.00 for twelve issues.*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Send this form (or just your name and address) to: WAP! ,1879 East Orange Grove Blvd. Pasadena, CA 91104

*1 year/$25.00 rate is available to established freelance professionals only. General public rate is $45.00/year. The rate for full-time employees or executives of publishing companies is $95.00. Rate qualification is the decision of the WAP! Editorial Board.

"The Vietnamese are portrayed in derogatory terms which I will not repeat here. All the terms used... are, in my opinion, written to fuel hatred for a particular ethnic group.

"The action in the comic includes shooting a Vietnamese woman in the mouth, rape, violence and brutality. The flashbacks continue until the veteran of this wretched piece rapes his own wife, then shoots her. This is a comic which portrays senseless killing and brutality."

This is the writing of someone who has either not read the comic or does not know how to read comics. It's a description calculated to arouse the wrath of liberals, without regard to a context Ms. Cosman either does not care to present or does not understand; her assumption that *Hellblazer* is "light reading and comic adventure" is baldly contradicted by the comic itself. Yes, *Hellblazer #5* has violent images, but it presents a clear and powerful parable about the violence the United States invoked in Vietnam coming home to roost, and we are invited to view the war in Vietnam and feel the guilt of Vietnam through a soldier's eyes. Ms. Cosman ignores this, because a proper reading of the comic won't get the enraged reaction she requires.

She uses similar tactics when discussing *Sisterhood of Steel*:

"SISTERHOOD OF STEEL is a more sophisticated piece of writing, targeting gratuitous violence and perversion at women.

"The female menstrual cycle provides the opportunity to interject how the person hates being a woman. What this has to do with the comic is beyond me. In this publication, the common use of the word shut is applied descriptively to women.

"Violence is markedly depicted by such actions as cutting out the tongue of a woman, repeatedly chaining her, whipping her and then drinking her blood. This is followed by the penultimate bondage as the female victim is sealed inside an underground cave to die. Group violence towards women takes place as 12 virgins are hung upside down and butchered. This is entertainment?"

Christy Marx cogently responded to these accusations in the following letter. It's a fine example of how to reply to this sort of attack:

An Open Letter to Canada

I've recently learned of an article in which a certain Ms. Francene Cosman made a rather vicious attack upon my integrity as a woman and a writer, and my book, The Sisterhood of Steel Graphic Novel.

I am an American and my purpose in writing this rebuttal is not to preach or lecture to the Canadian people. Nonetheless, since this attack was upon my character, it is important that I have the opportunity to respond in kind.

First, a word of explanation. In addition to writing for film, TV, animation and comic books, I am the creator and writer of *The Sisterhood of Steel* Graphic Novel. A Graphic Novel is an illustrated book in which a story is told in a sequential series of panel art.

My Graphic Novel is 72 pages long, with high quality printing and paper and is the continuation of a previously existing series. It is an adult story dealing with mature, adult themes and written for an adult audience. The Sisterhood of the title is a group of powerful, independent warrior-women during a Greco-Roman time period who have banded together as the Sisterhood in order to protect their rights as women during a harsh and violent era. I have spent years developing the society of the Sisterhood because I was interested in how a realistic organization of such women might have functioned.

Most of all, *The Sisterhood of Steel* is a tale of epic adventure and courage in the face of grim adversity from a woman's point of view.

Ms. Cosman, in more than one instance, uses a "logic" which at my most charitable I will call specious. She employs tricks which I have seen used often here in the States which depend entirely upon the reader accepting what the so-called "authority" says without getting all the facts and without examining the deception behind the apparent "facts". One must be able to sort opinion from fact and people like Ms. Cosman are highly prone to the bald statement of opinion as though it were fact.

To begin, she isolates a single line from my book, twists it to her own warped views, gives it a significance that is light-years out of all proportion to the line's significance in the book and then admits she doesn't understand its meaning.

Ms. Cosman also seems bothered that this line occurs in a scene which touches briefly upon the reality of women having a menstrual cycle. This is a fact of life and in an entire military organization of women, it would be a pretty major fact of life. Perhaps she is one of the poor, benighted women who are embarrassed by this subject and feel it should kept out of public view, just as in ancient times women were locked inside dark huts during their menses and treated as though they were filthy and defiled objects. This is a healthy attitude?

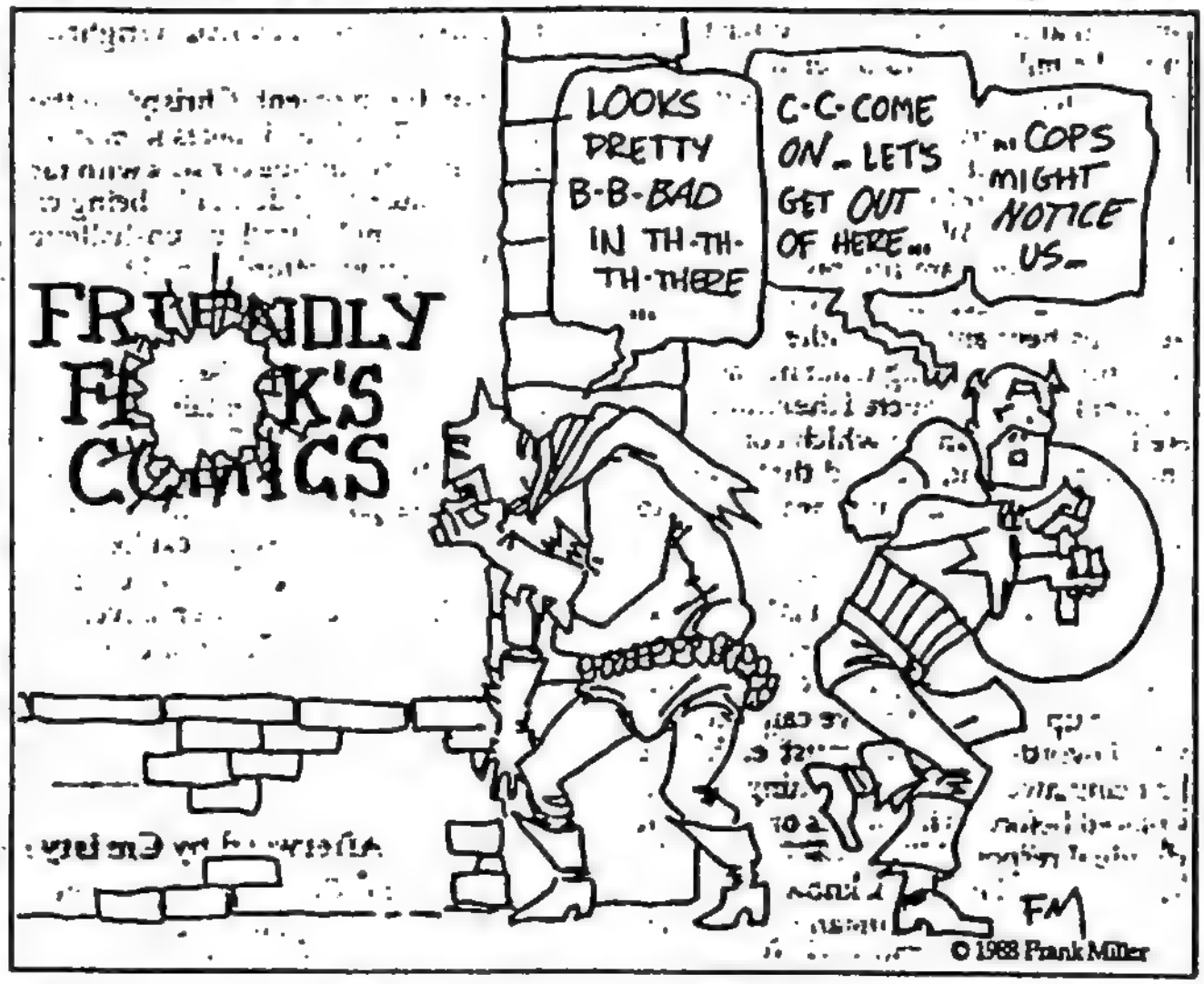
Then there was the matter of the word "slut" of which she finds "common use". Ah, yes, here it is, appearing one time, on page 30. It occurs when a Sister is captured by a group of Slavers, enemies of the Sisterhood. She spits in the face of her captor and he calls her a "slut". I suppose I should have had him shake a finger at her and say, "Naughty, naughty. Bad girl make boo-boo."

Since Ms. Cosman doesn't seem to understand drama, bear with me for a quick explanation on her behalf. There is a little something which occurs in all dramatic literature called dramatic tension. To keep it short and sweet, one has a protagonist who represents one set of values and an antagonist who represents another set of values and these two sets of values clash,

via the protagonist and antagonist, and this gives us dramatic tension. This gives us story and plot and character and color and flavor and texture and everything that makes dramatic literature into dramatic literature.

By isolating certain elements in my book, she attempts to make it appear that I condone, even promote, such things as depravity and ritual sacrifice. This falls little short of libel and is a malicious defamation of my character. To show how severely she has misrepresented the book and the story, the scenes to which she objected occupy no more than four and a third pages out of sixty-three actual pages of story. It is a subplot, yet she created the false impression that my story consisted of nothing else.

The fact is that my series has always dealt with such themes as honor, nobility, pride, duty, courage, adversity and spiritual strength. These themes are carried through in the Graphic Novel and it is these themes and the rescue of the enslaved woman which are the backbone of the story, not the scenes of violence.



By her specious logic, any actor who played the role of a rapist would be a rapist in real life, any actress who played an adulteress would be an adulteress, anyone who writes about murder would be a murderer and so on. She is unable to sort out the difference between what fictional characters say and do, and what an author might personally believe or advocate.

Like many other non-creative types I've encountered, Ms. Cosman is fond of buzzwords, especially one of the most popular siamese-twin buzzwords of the 1980's – "gratuitous violence". Coming from minds such as hers, this has been warped to mean that any violence, no matter to what end it is used, is gratuitous. These words have been reduced to a trite, meaningless cliche.

I am too good a writer to use gratuitous violence. I don't have room for it! When one has written as many scripts as I have, one learns to be pithy. There simply isn't a single instant to waste on anything gratuitous when one is telling a complex story with a large cast of characters. Every line and every scene I write must have a purpose or out it goes.

The fact is that the scenes of horror in my book accomplish exactly what they set out to do – to cause feelings of horror and repulsion for the events taking place. When my lead character, a young warrior-woman, accidentally comes upon the mad Prince O'Mah bathing in a pool of blood, she is absolutely stunned with horror...and so is the reader! That is the intent of the scene. It is a moment of ultimate horror designed to make us loathe with all our souls the depravity of Prince O'Mah. I will point out here that my Prince O'Mah is based directly upon the historical figure of Caligula, who managed to be a violent sadist without the help of magazines, movies or TV.

Ms. Cosman would make out that the violence in my book represents violence against all women. More specious logic. The fact is that there is one woman character who suffers a number of horrors because the subplot happens to be about her. Men are victimized by O'Mah as well, but I guess men don't count.

Oddly enough, I only decided to tell this story because it was demanded by so many of my readers. The enslaved character appeared briefly in an earlier book, but my male and female readers wrote in begging to know what her ultimate fate was. I complied.

Ms. Cosman suffers from another delusion as well—this incorrect, but persistent notion that sequentially illustrated stories (most commonly known by the outmoded name of "comic books" - which has nothing to do with humor) are strictly for children.

Ah, that wondrous non-logic again. If you turn on the TV set and see a children's cartoon, do you then assume that all shows on TV are for children? If you walk into a bookstore and see a section of cookbooks, do you assume that bookstores only sell cookbooks?

Of course not. Just as movies, TV, books and other art forms have a diverse appeal, the same is true for

"comic books" and Graphic Novels. There are comic books specifically written for young children, for adolescents, for college age and there is an ever-growing market that is for adults. Most Graphic Novels fall into the adult category due to a combination of price and content. Let us once and for all set aside this fallacy that comic books are "kids' stuff".

For three years, I've published a personal newsletter called *Scrolls of the Sisterhood* in which I've engaged in an upbeat and lively exchange with my readers about a wide range of topics. From this I know that my readership is nearly an even 50-50 split between male and female. I know that my readership is highly intelligent and sophisticated. They are nearly all college age and older, frequently in their mid-30's. Among them I find attorneys, doctors, sociologists, electrician, psychologists, teachers, registered nurse, college students majoring in math and science, die-hard feminists, men and women in the military, and other writers and artists and editors. I have many devoted readers in Canada, none of whom had any trouble understanding what my book was really about.

Ms. Cosman glibly spins off the gobbledy-gook of "growing body of evidence." Well, I can do that, too. Studies have shown that there are not proven ties between viewing of images and actions. Ed Meese tried to pull that garbage on us here and the studies which he quoted were later refuted as meaning what he said they meant by the very people who conducted the studies. For every study there is a counter-study which contradicts it. It is widely known and acknowledged that statistics can be perverted to show anything you want them to show.

We are bombarded every day by images. Do we run out and buy every commercial product that is hawked at us by TV, magazines, newspapers and billboards? I certainly hope not. We have the ability to accept or reject the effect images have upon us, just as we can accept or reject the impact of words. But we must each take responsibility for being aware, for questioning and examining what is placed before us in images or words. It is a matter of individual responsibility.

Those who know me and my work know that I am a strong and outspoken supporter of human rights. That means women, men and children. There are things that I hate. I hate tyranny. I hate repression. I hate censorship. I hate the mindless acts of violence committed every minute of every day on this planet in the names of politics, religion and other mindless "causes". I hate ignorance, stupidity, bigotry and apathy no matter what gilded masks they wear.

What Cosman espouses is censorship and totalitarian mind-control under the seemingly legitimate guise of protecting children and women. You may have missed Big Brother in 1984, but that doesn't mean you've escaped Big Mother in 1988.

Big Mother wants to control what you read and see and hear and think. Big Mother doesn't want you to make decisions for yourself. In her vast maternal wisdom, Big Mother will pass smothering legislation which will erode your ability to read what you wish, which will insidiously remove "objectionable" literature and images from your bookshelves and your TV screens and movie theaters and your art museums and soon you'll wake up and find that because you stood by the wayside and did nothing, now it is too late to do anything at all.

And besides, they're only "comic books", right?

Wrong. They are your rights and freedoms. Defend them now, while you have some left. Actively oppose Parliament Bill C-54. Actively protest to the Crown's Attorney any and all seizures of books, including comic books (as has happened in Calgary). Let your government know you aren't being fooled by this carefully orchestrated, nation-wide attack on your rights.

I welcome any comments or queries. You may write to: Christy Marx, Box 1952, Wrightwood, CA, 92397.

For the moment, Christy's letter has silenced Ms. Cosman. That's all it takes in most of these cases, to go up against would-be censors with facts and a logical attack, because they don't like being challenged. And we can't let a single attack go unchallenged.

Nor can we afford to make the mistake of believing this is only about comic books. In Canada, the bill that Christy speaks of, Parliament Bill C-54, would ban not only comic books with "sex" in them, but many films and *any* printed material containing "corrupting" content, including adult comics, *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Photo Magazine*, Henry Miller and Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon novels, Margaret Atwood novels, or anything that could possibly be construed as "exploiting" sex. Keep in mind that this is a "liberal" bill. Our enemies are not just those who call themselves conservatives. There are no liberals or conservatives. There are only those who are for freedom and those who are against it, no matter what labels they choose.

Afterword by Christy Marx

Francene Cosman, who wrote the attack on my series, *Sisterhood of Steel*, was described to me by another Canadian as "a government-sponsored feminist". She was or is on some sort of a council that advised the ruling political party of Canada on the "status of women."

As the above article indicates, she also had some harsh words for *Hellblazer*. DC was advised of the attack by a Canadian retailer and chose not to deal with it.

This is not the first problem I've had with *SOS*, nor with censorship in general. In *The Comics Journal #101* (Aug. 1985), I showed a censored page and discussed censorship of the Epic Comic version of *SOS*, issue #4. This censorship was a result of distributor pressure upon executives of Marvel Comics over "mature" content in Epic Comics.

In *The Comics Journal #109* (July 1986), I traded words with a man who had written in to debunk my first article about censorship, claiming it wasn't censorship at all, but editorial judgment. I pointed out that having a script approved, drawn, inked, colored and ready to go the printer, when changes are suddenly demanded out of the blue, damn well is a case of censorship.

In that second article, I made the following suggestion to retailers: "...lay out the store in such a way that the comics geared to children are placed in front on low shelves to be accessible; next place the teen-age/college-level books at a higher shelf level, mixing all the brands of comics together and arranging them alphabetically by title (it's been proven this sells better); and finally have a section that is somehow partly partitioned off and clearly labelled as 'mature' material. The adults who come in to buy books will probably also appreciate having an area to themselves and it should soothe the anxieties of parents worried about what their precious little darlings are exposed to."

I made this suggestion as a matter of common sense. I note that some retailers now take this approach, though I will not be so bold as to claim credit for it. In spite of the stand I took back in 1985 and 1986, I felt invisible. I felt no support from fellow pros or the comic book community, nor felt the censorship was noted or taken seriously.

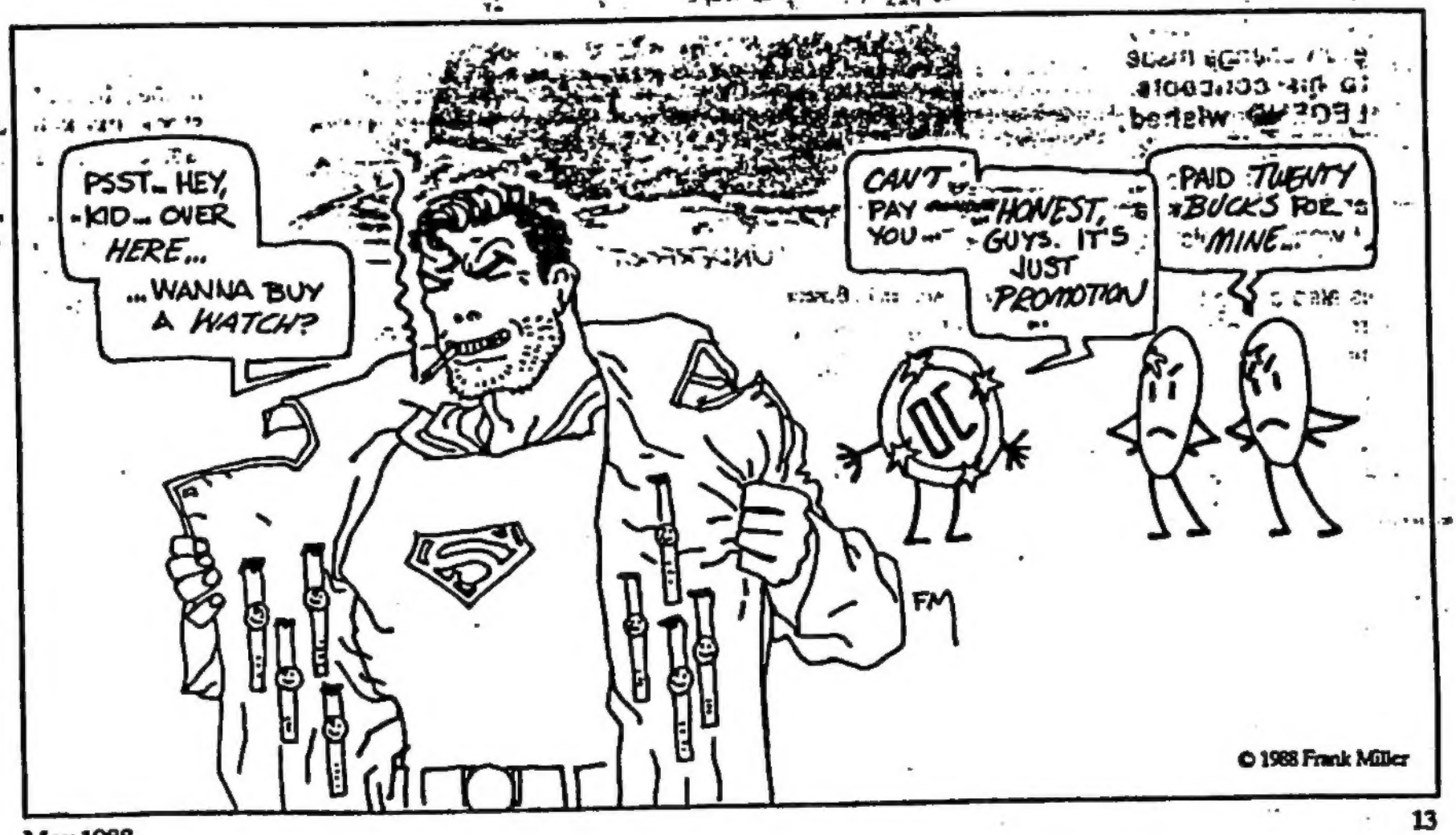
I suspect that this was because I am not a "name". I'm not enough of a somebody and *SOS* is hardly a mainstay of the market. In fact, the only definite result of taking the stand I took, is that my deal with Epic to produce a *Sisterhood* Graphic Novel was cancelled by Archie Goodwin.

What bothered me then and continues to bother me today is the amount of influence being asserted by a particular distributor in the direction of censorship. This has been covered before, so I won't go into it in detail, except to say that I also felt the indirect effects on "Carlos McLlyr," a serial produced by Peter Ledger and myself for *Eclipse Monthly*, in which we made changes at the request of Eclipse not because Eclipse minded the content, but because they anticipated a *possible* problem with this distributor!

This is indirect censorship at its worst, when we are all placed in a position of having to second-guess the effect of our work, when we have to pull back, censor ourselves, or work in fear that what we write or draw is unacceptable to someone who can make or break us financially.

We have one weapon and one weapon only against direct and indirect censorship – unity. Whether we form a guild or an association or however we work it, the only way to have power is to overcome our personal egos, petty problems, bullshit corporate loyalty and any of the other things that get in the way, and band together as professional creators. Let us take a stand for art, for creativity, for new directions, for something just a little bit higher and more noble than the treadmill of mindless, production-line comics churned out for the sake of money alone.

If we can't do that, we have defeated ourselves without the corporations or executives or censors having to do a damn thing. They can sit back and have a good laugh while we continue to snipe away at one another, backstab, play silly little games of ego and power, and watch our livelihoods go down the toilet.


PSST... HEY, KID... OVER HERE...
...WANNA BUY A WATCH?
CAN'T PAY YOU... HONEST, GUYS. IT'S JUST PROMOTION
PAID TWENTY BUCKS FOR MINE...
DC
FM
© 1988 Frank Miller

BRAKABRAKABRAKABRAK

"CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO..." Dept.: Imagine the surprise of MR. LEGEND, the one who created all those superheroes, when he got a phone call from CURRENT WRITER of some of LEGEND's more "apocalyptic" characters. Seems CURRENT, who's working on a limited series for BIG COMPANY involving LEGEND's creations, heard that LEGEND is unhappy with the company's handling of them. CURRENT assured LEGEND that the upcoming series was a tribute to him, though LEGEND remains horrified by every change made to his concepts. LEGEND wished CURRENT luck, hung up the phone, and said to his wife, "I wonder if this guy paying tribute to me is also going to pay me any of his royalties."

THIS COURT DOES FIND THE MATERIALS TO BE OBSCENE USING THE STANDARDS AS SET OUT IN PEOPLE VERSUS SUGAYA--
UH, SEQUOYA--
THAT'S "SEQUOIA," YER HONOR...
HOW JUDGE FOXCOPIER
"UNDERFOOT"

© 1988 Stephen R. Bissette

Meanwhile, Illinois' crack judiciary continues to mull over the ramifications of the Friendly Frank's case.

"DEPT. OF CORRECTIONS": A couple things. First off, we're happy to report that the first rumor in our last column ("LOVE AND EMPTY POCKETS") was way off base. The publisher's representative assures us that not only are they paying the freelancers in question lots and lots of money, but only *one* of the freelancers ever worked on the publisher's house... Second, in our article on the Marvel back-of-the-voucher statement, we may have made a mistake in saying that work-for-hire agreements date back to the 40s. We checked a few old contracts, and none of them mentions work-for-hire! It seems the principle didn't exist before 1976, when the revised copyright act was signed into law. The companies introduced work-for-hire agreements to sidestep the '76 copyright act, and though the companies like to claim comics have always been done work-for-hire, the concept doesn't turn up in any contracts we've seen from before 1978, when the copyright act took effect. We're doing more research on this, and we'll let you know what we turn up...

MARVEL TALES Dept.: The Los Angeles *Times* business section of March 6th ran a short article about New World Pictures' financial woes. (For those who came in late, as Lee Falk used to say, New World is Marvel's parent company.) Its troubles come from having much of its money tied up in the stock market during last October's crash. According to The *Times*, New World posted a loss of nearly $18 million in the first quarter of this year -- and a New World executive was quoted as saying Marvel's publications brought in a total of $2.3 million to the company in 1987. Which seems a little low to us, even for net profit. If it's GROSS profit, it's a disaster. What does this mean for Marvel hegemony?... Meanwhile, New World has functionally shut down the Marvel Productions animation studio, and bookmakers in L.A. are betting on a mercy killing later this year...

And what's this we hear about Marvel briefly flirting with the idea of shifting from an incentive to a royalty system like everyone else's? Not likely, we're afraid. The reason? According to our informant, New World isn't aware that incentives are something it's not obligated to pay. If they find out, they're likely to dump the incentive payments and pocket the difference, given their otherwise bleak financial outlook... There's also an interesting but thoroughly unverified story making the rounds as to why Marvel started up their new back-of-the-voucher statement, especially when a few years back they were making everyone who walked in the door sign a sweeping work-for-hire "contract." The story goes that not only are there a lot of newcomers who have never signed it, but the person who used to keep track of the signed "contracts" no longer works for the company and now no one can find them...

"WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND" Dept.: Was that one James Shooter we saw writing scripts for Continuity? We think it was. Now that both Jim and Cary Bates are working for him, does that make Neal Adams the new Mort Weisinger? Since you're a freelancer again, Jim, send us your address so we can send you your free sample copy of WAPI.

"OVERHEARD AT OAKLAND" Dept.: A DC functionary explained to a freelancer that the reason the company is coming out with 35 or so new projects in the coming year is that they have to make up for the money they'll lose by not having a WATCHMEN or DARK KNIGHT. Who *did* kill the golden goose, anyway?

"INDIAN GIVE US NOW OUR DAILY BREAD" Dept.: Over at another big company, THAT EDITOR hired THAT WRITER to work on a licensed job. Seems the premises had to be run past the company that owned the property. EDITOR gave WRITER a special rate that included the many premises he'd have to work up. Everything went smoothly for nine issues or so, until the accounting dept. figured out what was going on. They quickly informed WRITER that EDITOR had *no* authority to decide rates, that the company didn't pay for premises that weren't used, and that they would deduct the sizable "overpayment" from WRITER's next check. Okay, true believers, who *says* this isn't the bookkeeper age of comics?

"JUST SAY NO" Dept.: Now it seems there are stories revolving around *WAP!*. We recently found out that THAT FANZINE has been badgering A CERTAIN FREELANCER (you know who you are, and so do we) to subscribe to *WAP!* for them – at the freelancer's rate! Well, we're not cops, and we certainly won't do anything to stop it. But we like to think that freelancers have enough pride and sense of solidarity not to get suckered into chickenshit games like that. Hell, we've been subsidizing the rest of the industry (including THAT FANZINE) long enough. Let them pay their fair share, and subsidize us for awhile... And we've also heard a rumor that a HIGHLY DISREGARDED FANZINE is so afraid that freelancers won't bother talking to them anymore, now that we're around, that they've started up a "*WAP!* Watch" to try to discredit everything we print. But we don't really believe that one. Even *they* have better things to do with their time...

"EAST MEETS WEST?" Dept.: No, we're not talking about Jademan Comics. We've been hearing speculations lately on how that big EAST COAST DISTRIBUTOR is looking to plant his operations on the Pacific shores by buying up (or squeezing out, depending on which version you hear) that big WEST COAST DISTRIBUTOR who's going through rocky times. A virtual monopoly like that would certainly add a peculiar facet to the direct sales market...

"WE COME TO BURY CAESAR, NOT TO PRAISE HIM" Dept.: Guess what happened to Jack Kirby after Marvel finally decided to return his artwork? On top of everything else, they were in such a belated rush to return his pages that they sent him some of Joe Sinnott's share as well. Jack sent Joe his fair portion. (Another regular inker of Jack's in the Marvel years also got pages beyond his share, including some he didn't even ink, but he has chosen to sell them.) But we've saved the best for last. Jack actually had to shell out more than $800 to get his art back because the ever-gracious Marvel Comics Group billed the Kirbys for the shipping...

SHORT NOTES: Congratulations to Chris Claremont, who's engaged to be married... and to Mike Baron, who's also engaged and just bought himself a new house... Mike Barr set to take over DOC SAVAGE after Denny O'Neil finishes a run on the regular book that will follow the mini-series... Harlan Ellison to do piece on current comics scene for PLAYBOY... DC is touting both British hit artist Dave McKeon's BLACK ORCHID and ARKHAM ASYLUM as the next WATCHMEN (WATCHMENS?)... Len Wein to do OMAC and possibly PREDATOR for DC... Marv Wolfman has returned to SUPERMAN, after a fashion. He developed and is story-editing the new SUPERMAN Saturday morning cartoon show, debuting this fall. How ironic!... And the BATMAN cartoon show has been shelved as a Saturday morning project, but might have new life this fall – as a prime time cartoon series. Seems animation isn't covered by the Writer's Guild, which is currently in the midst of a strike that will delay the new season... TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES prominently mentioned in the May 1 series finale of MAGNUM, P.I...

Have a new assignment you're proud of? Drop us a line and we'll tell the world...

And we'd also like to apologize to all those freelancers who didn't get a copy of *WAP! 1*. No insults intended by the omissions; it's just that our mailing list is far from complete. If you know of any freelancers who would like to see *WAP!* – and who among us wouldn't? – send us their addresses and we'll shoot off a free sample copy. (Non-freelancers may still receive a sample by sending us a check for $2.50.)

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This Issue's Contributors

Brent Anderson
Steve Bissette
Geof Darrow
Christy Marx
Steve Murphy
Cheryl Hackworth Prindle
Bill Sienkiewicz
Michael Zulli

WAP! Editorial Board

Steve Gerber
Steven Grant
Frank Miller

Brad Munson, Publisher

WAP!

1879 East Orange Grove
Pasadena, CA 91104